



CONNECTICUT LEADS THE WAY WITH SCHOOL READINESS AND EARLY READING SUCCESS 1997 - 2005

Connecticut is the first state in the nation to link School Readiness and school steadiness through a comprehensive School Readiness and Early Reading Success legislative strategy. The School Readiness legislation seeks to meet the National Education Goal that every child is ready to learn upon entry to kindergarten through a comprehensive preschool plan. The Early Reading Success legislation seeks to halt social promotion, create optimal early learning environments and ensure that every child is reading well. School Readiness and Early Reading Success are pivotal benchmarks to school success and life-long learning.

The 1997 School Readiness Act

The School Readiness Legislation (PA97-259) passed unanimously by the Connecticut Legislature in 1997. Resulting from a commitment to prevention and positive outcomes for children in health, safety and learning, the legislation captures best practices and research-based findings in early care and education. Key components of the legislation include:

Quality

Accreditation - Preschool programs must be accredited or in the process of accreditation with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Head Start standards or other like standards determined by the State Department of Education.

Quality Enhancement Dollars - Dollars are set aside for quality enhancements in preschool, to be determined by the local School Readiness Council. Quality enhancements can include-provider accreditation, comprehensive services, educational equipment, teacher training and scholarships, support linkages to informal care, technical assistance in preschool planning for growth in supply and facilities.

“The School Readiness program rewards the hard work of the students, encourages their innate curiosity and leads them to a road of success. It also rewards the hard work of the teachers and administrators of the schools with tangible, verifiable results. It is an excellent program with an excellent track record.”



Senator Thomas P. Gaffey, Chair Education Committee

A Career Ladder and Accreditation Training - supports a career ladder to have work experience, training and diverse courses count as part of a substantive career path through Charts A Course. Programs are assisted towards accreditation through five accreditation sites throughout the state.

Evaluation - Builds in a longitudinal evaluation of child outcomes in school readiness to ascertain what needs to be modified and what needs to be expanded

Full Access

Open to Families - Provides a program for families across income lines with a sliding scale mechanism to allow both state and personal payments.

Contemporary Time Frames - Stresses priority for full day, year round programming to address both the child's learning needs and workforce trends.

Pooling of Funds and Resources - School readiness dollars are wrapped around childcare dollars to extend the day to full day and to include summer hours for working families.

Health and Safety

Health Care for Every Child - Requires early care and education providers to ensure that each child has health care, Early Periodic Screening and Diagnostic Treatment and access to dental care.

Protects Children - Requires worker criminal background checks to protect children from adults with history of aggression, child abuse or illicit activity that could harm.



Community Design and Coordination

Local Coordination and Planning - Establishes local School Readiness Councils to determine the assets, gaps and needs for quality preschool programs. Brings city and education together by appointing the mayor and superintendent of schools as Co-Chairs.

Service Integration

Links to Literacy and Employment - Requires planning and linkages for family literacy, employment and job training opportunity, addressing the whole family in the interests of early learning.

Parent Involvement - Expects providers to work with parents as partners. Encourages participation for parents as key decision-makers for their children.

Transition to Elementary School - States that each school readiness plan must prepare for transition to ensure that the gains of preschool do not get lost upon entry to kindergarten the early grades.

"We will need to explore ways to further improve the quality of School Readiness programs and determine what the unmet capacity needs are for these programs."

Representative
Denise W. Merrill

Program Expansion and Facilities Growth

Children's Ages - Provides a preschool program for both three and four year olds. Most states have expanded only to four-year-olds.

CHEFA Facilities Financing

Program - Loans dollars to programs for renovation, relocation and facilities expansion to address both safety and increased space for the number of children needing quality preschool environments

Technical Assistance in Growth

Planning - Provides a public private partnership with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, a national community development organization that channels financial resources and technical assistance into community, the Graustein Foundation and the state, to ensure proper planning and projections in growth, facilities renovation, relocation and expansion.

"We're proud of the investment we've made in early childhood and will continue our commitment to children."

Representative
Robert M. Ward

The 1998 Early Reading Success Act

The Early Reading Success Legislation (PA 98-243) passed in 1998 as the next step to school readiness. With increased awareness that learning patterns begin early and influence the practice and outcomes of lifelong learning, the Early Reading Success strategy focuses on creating environments that enhance formal school success. The legislation seeks to bolster early learning and addresses the roots of early reading success for every child. A child who has a quality school readiness experience and who loves reading has passport to successful learning. Key components include:

Full day kindergarten - Schools can help improve school success through a full day kindergarten grant program option. Applicants must include kindergarten curriculum; language development and appropriate reading readiness experience; a professional development component in the teaching of reading, reading readiness and assessment of reading competency; as well as a plan for coordination between full-day program and school readiness programs.

Reduced Class Size – Schools can apply, within available appropriations, for a grant program to reduce class size in grades kindergarten to three, inclusive, to not more than eighteen students.

After School and Summer School Programs with Literacy – Schools applying must provide for individualized or small group instruction for each student, parent involvement, a professional development component for teachers in grades kindergarten to three, that emphasizes the teaching of reading and reading readiness as well as the assessment of reading competency.



The 1999 Education Accountability Act

In 1999, Connecticut passed the **Early Reading Success Institute Act** (PA 99-227) to further the early reading success of children through articulated curriculum and teacher training based on a Reading Panel's findings of the skills and knowledge teachers need to teach reading effectively. The legislation creates comprehensive early intervention literacy strategies targeting at-risk children in kindergarten through third grade.

Early Reading Success Reading Panel – a Reading Panel is created of experts in child development, early education, national reading scholars, higher education, school administrators, teachers, and teacher training to ascertain the skills and knowledge that teachers need to have to teach reading effectively.

An Early Reading Success Institute - An Early Reading Success Institute is to be established that provides statewide teacher training in early reading success. The Reading Panel findings are to be turned into curriculum modules for schools.

Comprehensive School Reading Plans - each priority school district must develop a three-year, in service reading instruction training plan.

Teacher Training in Teaching Reading – Teachers are to be trained in teaching reading based on the findings of the Reading Panel. Both the Haskins Lab and the Regional Education Councils begin statewide training of elementary school teachers, utilizing the core findings of the Panel Report.

Federal Awards in Early Reading



A Federal Match to Honor Model Policy in Early Reading Success - Congresswoman DeLauro leads the Connecticut delegation to provide a federal match for the Early Reading Success strategy. Haskins Lab, an internationally renowned Institute on the causes of reading difficulty, is hired to design and train a targeted group of Connecticut elementary schools in reading success. Intensive summer and yearlong teacher training begins.

The 1999 Education Accountability Act

In 1999, Connecticut passed the **Education Accountability Act** (PA 99-288) supports early reading success strategies by requiring principals and boards of local school districts to maintain reading standards. The legislation requires that principals justify promoting students who fail to meet the standard, notify

parents of children who do not meet the standard and develop a personal reading plan. Local school boards review and revise their promotion policies by reducing social promotion and fostering student achievement.

The policies call for:

Accountability on Social Promotion -

Schools must justify social promotion. The burden is placed on the school, rather than the child or parent, to explain why a child is promoted who has not reached grade level expectations.

Improvement Lists – The act requires the State Board of Education to compile a prioritized list of elementary and middle schools that need improvement by analyzing master test scores and performance trends. The education commissioner meets every two years with superintendents and principals from the listed priority schools to discuss improvement plans.

Summer School Grant Programs – A new state grant program funding summer or weekend programs in priority school districts supports districts for five years after receiving comprehensive spending plans.



Additional Instruction – 4th grade or 6th grade students who fail to meet remedial standards must attend state-funded after-school, summer school or other such programs unless they are otherwise exempted by showing progress from the additional instruction provided. Those students who do not attend a transition program are not promoted to the next grade.

Early Reading Standard – An early reading standard that measures 1st through 3rd graders' reading ability is implemented to designate those children who are not performing in reading based on the State Board of Education's guidelines.



Early Intervention in Reading Difficulty -

Schools shall evaluate the reading level of students enrolled in grades one to three in the middle of the school year and at the end of the school year. If a student is reading below grade level by the middle of the year, parent notification is required. By the end of the year, the school must develop a personal reading plan for the student.



The 2004 Teacher Education Programs at Institutions of Higher Education Act

(Public Act No. 04-75) requires that beginning July 1, 2006, the curriculum of any teacher preparation program leading to professional certification to include instruction in literacy skills and processes that reflects current research and best practices in the field. The instruction must be incorporated into the requirements for a student major and concentration. The legislation recognizes that every child in Connecticut needs to read. When teachers are fully trained in the skills and knowledge necessary to teach young children to read, these problems decrease.



Reading is a Complex Act: Brain research is teaching us much about how children learn to read. Research has also contributed to our understanding of how social, cultural, environmental and experiential factors influence how children learn. This led to the development of new, evidence-based and effective teaching methods. Scientists estimate that reading is teachable to 95 percent of our youngsters. As reading is a complex act, the teaching of it demands significant knowledge and skill.

As reported by the National Reading Panel (2000), there is significant and convincing evidence that it is possible to improve both the quality of reading instruction and to reduce the incidence of reading problems for most children. Teachers need to be prepared in new and effective methods of teaching reading and children need programs tailored to their needs and context to achieve success.

What do teachers need to know?

- Early screening and on-going assessment are essential to prevent many reading difficulties from developing in the first place.
- Competencies in oral language are pivotal in reading instruction to provide the foundation for literacy.
- Word identification skills, including phonics and instruction in phonemic awareness must be explicit and systematic in the teaching of word identification skills.
- Teachers must offer a wide variety of interesting texts appropriate to grades and the individual children's reading levels.
- Effective reading instruction requires the coordination and integration of the teaching of spelling, writing, comprehension and word identification skills.
- Teachers need adequate training and on-going professional development preparation to teach reading, as teaching reading is a science based on knowledge and research about how children learn to read.

Teaching Reading: It's About the Teachers!

Although one of the highest achieving states in the nation, Connecticut sustains a persistent gap in reading achievement between children in poverty and children from affluent families. Research demonstrates that the best investment for tax dollars is in teaching teachers the skills necessary to teach reading. Early Reading Success Pilot schools launched in 2000 in Connecticut have shown remarkable success. Providing on sight reading specialist, access to research and the ability to “practice” the art of teaching are proven strategies for teacher competency.



"Reading is the foundation upon which Connecticut's youngest citizens can build their education and their lives. By preparing our youngsters for school, education professionals will ensure reading proficiency and success for years to come."

M. Jodi Rell Governor



The new legislation puts in place a comprehensive system to ensure that teachers are prepared to teach reading before they enter the classroom. The bill envisions a new teacher workforce, trained in methods proven by scientific research to be successful in teaching children to read. Implementation of the tenants of this bill in the curriculum of higher education for teacher preparation will ensure that every Connecticut child becomes a reader.





Substitute House Bill No. 5507

Public Act No. 04-75

AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Section 10-145a of the general statutes is amended by adding subsection (f) as follows (*Effective July 1, 2004*):

(NEW) (f) On and after July 1, 2006, any program of teacher preparation leading to professional certification shall include, as part of the curriculum, instruction in literacy skills and processes that reflects current research and best practices in the field of literacy training. Such instruction shall be incorporated into requirements of student major and concentration.

Approved May 10, 2004

